

WISDOM—SOPHIA: CONTRASTING APPROACHES TO A COMPLEX THEME

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By dedicating the main religious building of the new imperial capital to Christ as the Wisdom of God, Emperor Constantine placed the concept and the term “Wisdom” at the center of the Greek Christian religious consciousness and civilization. Furthermore, the rebuilding of Hagia Sophia by Justinian, as the “Great Church,” which would serve as the most prestigious model of Byzantine Christianity for centuries, made the concept of Wisdom into a truly permanent symbol of Christian truth and beauty in the Orthodox East as a whole. Without attempting to imitate the model architecturally, many regional capitals of the Byzantine Christian world made a point by dedicating their cathedrals to “Divine Wisdom,” including particularly Thessaloniki, Ochrid, Kiev, Novgorod, Polotsk (all of the 11th century), and Trebizond (13th century).

In a volume dedicated to one of the most eminent art historians of our century, is there any reason to discuss once again such a central and well-studied topic of Byzantine cultural history? It seems to me that there are three reasons that justify such a discussion: (1) The concept of Holy Wisdom evokes, at least symbolically, the problem of the very identity of Byzantine civilization: Was it in continuity or in conflict with the legacy of ancient Greek thought? (2) The well-known appearance of the Wisdom-ideal in the iconography of the Palaeologan period has been recently studied anew by several scholars, and new elements of that iconography have been uncovered. (3) The peculiar developments in the interpretation of the Wisdom-ideal that occurred in Russia in the post-Byzantine and modern periods can be useful to art historians for their understanding, if not of the theme itself, at least of the reasons that impelled so many Russian scholars to study it—a particular case of “Byzance après Byzance.”

I

St. Paul himself uses the term “wisdom” (*sophia*) to designate the primary concern of the pagan Greeks: “the Greeks seek wisdom” (“Ἕλληνες σοφίαν ζητοῦσιν; 1 Cor. 1:22). However, his essential purpose is to affirm that *Christ* is the true “Power and Wisdom of God” (Χριστὸν Θεοῦ δύναμιν καὶ Θεοῦ σοφίαν; *ibid.*, 24), that “He became for us wisdom from God” (ἐγενήθη ἡμῖν σοφία ἀπὸ Θεοῦ; *ibid.*, 30). On the basis of the New Testament, therefore, it was inevitable for Christian authors to use the term wisdom in at least two senses: the natural wisdom of the universe, which preoccupied the Greek philosophers, and the personalized and “true” Wisdom revealed in Christ. Some trends of Christian thought—Tertullian in the West, the monastic tradition in the East—saw utter opposition between the two “wisdoms,” but the mainstream of Greek patristic thought tended to consider the wisdom of ancient philosophy as fulfilled in Christ, and it is certainly that kind of “fulfillment” that was intended in the symbolism of the Great Church of Constantinople. “(Paul) speaks of two wisdoms,” writes Theodoret in a commentary on 1 Corinthians, “or even of three . . . one wisdom is the one given to men, which makes us to be reasonable beings and to discern the moral quality of our actions; it also allows us to discover crafts and sciences and to know God; the second wisdom is contemplated in creation . . . ; the third is manifested to us by our Savior, and is called ‘folly’ by the unbelievers.”¹

Whenever the idea of wisdom appears either in the form of a church dedicated to Wisdom or in iconography, these various meanings were necessarily present in the mind of both founders and artists. A synthetic interpretation was further en-

¹In 1 Cor. 1:21, PG 82, col. 236C.

couraged by the so-called Wisdom literature in the Bible, particularly the canonical book of Proverbs and the deuterocanonical, or apocryphal, books of Wisdom and the Siracid. The sometimes bland and always didactic character of this section of biblical literature did not prevent it from being very popular among Christians. Proverbs was used, since the very early centuries, as the basis of moral instruction of catechumens, which explains its presence within the Lenten *lectio continua* in the Byzantine pre-paschal liturgical season.² Furthermore, Prov. 9, since it introduces the image of personified Wisdom building a temple, was understood as referring to the Incarnation—the Divine Logos dwelling in the flesh—and was used as a reading for Marian feasts and, later, for the service of the consecration (ἐγκαίνια) of a new church. And since the authorship of the biblical Wisdom books was attributed to Solomon, who was also the builder of the Temple of Jerusalem, it is understandable that Emperor Justinian, entering the temple of Hagia Sophia, built by his commission, could well have exclaimed: “O Solomon, I have outdone you.”³

The same idea of God indwelling in a temple is expressed in the well-known mosaics of the apse of St. Sophia in Kiev, with its central figure of the Virgin orans, as temple of the incarnate God and therefore as temple of Wisdom (Fig. 1). A monumental inscription surrounds the figure. It is taken from Ps. 46 (45):6 and refers to Jerusalem, the city of God (πόλις; fem.): “God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved. God will help her, early, early.” The clear implication is that the Christian city of Kiev, as New Jerusalem, enjoys God’s protection, because the Divine Wisdom, born of the Virgin, dwells in it and particularly in this temple.⁴ This indwelling is further expressed in the monumental scene of the Communion of the Apostles,

represented immediately below the image of the Virgin.

The identification of Wisdom with Christ, Son of God, is rooted in the basic Greek Christian understanding of the Trinity. The classical scheme developed by the Cappadocian fathers in the fourth century, which affirmed that God is one single—totally transcendent and unknowable—*essence* (οὐσία) and three distinguishable *persons* (ὑποστάσεις), implied an objective personalization of that which was seen, in ancient Greek philosophy, as an impersonal divine attribute.⁵ Thus the Jewish tendency to personalize Wisdom in Proverbs led directly to the doctrine of the Logos in the Prologue of the Gospel of John.⁶

In developing trinitarian personalism, Greek patristic theology continued, of course, to affirm the unity of the Divine Being, expressed particularly in a unity of divine will and “energy.”⁷ There was, therefore, a possibility of considering Wisdom not only as a divine Person but also as a divine manifestation, or attribute, or “energy” (just as the term *Spirit* could designate the third Person of the Trinity as well as a divine gift to creatures). This concept of Wisdom as a divine manifestation was quite compatible with the idea, dear to Byzantine humanists, that some legitimate understanding of *Sophia* could have been present in ancient pagan Greek thought to be fulfilled in the Christian revelation of the Logos, the personal and perfect Wisdom of God.

These theological presuppositions, to which I can allude here only superficially, explain the distinctions proposed by Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos of Constantinople (1353–54, 1364–76). His text has direct relevance for the understanding of contemporary iconographic developments in the Palaeologan period. For in one of his three long treatises specifically designed to explain the text of Prov. 9:1–5, Philotheos speaks, on the one hand, of Wisdom as “a common, natural wisdom and energy of the one and consubstantial Trinity,” but, in the same breath, he also writes: “The wise theologians also affirmed that the role and the image of Divine Wisdom belonged in particular to the Son

²The practice originated in Jerusalem; cf. A. Rahlfs, “Die alttestamentlichen lektionen der griechischen Kirche,” *NachrGött* (Berlin, 1915), 107, 206.

³The exclamation, possibly apocryphal, is reported by Ps. Codinus, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1843), 143.

⁴Cf. S. S. Averintsev, “K uyasneniyu smysla nadpisi nad konkhoy tsentral'noi absidy Sofii Kievskoi” (The meaning of the inscription over the arch of the central apse of St. Sophia in Kiev), in *Drevne-russkoe iskusstvo. Khudozhestvennaya kul'tura domongol'skoi Rusi* (Moscow, 1972), 25–49. The article also gives a very thorough analysis of the significance of the Wisdom idea in Byzantine civilization. It is based on the restored text of the inscription, which is presently damaged (cf. A. A. Beletsky, “Grecheskie nadpisi na mozaikakh Sofii Kievskoi,” in V. N. Lazarev, *Mozaiki Sofii Kievskoi* (Moscow, 1960), 162–65.

⁵Cf., for instance, G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London, 1952), 157–78; J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York, 1983), 181–83.

⁶Cf. G. A. Barrois, *The Face of Christ in the Old Testament* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1974), 148.

⁷This is the main point of the treatise of St. Gregory of Nyssa, *To Ablabius that there are not three Gods*, ed. F. Mueller (Leiden, 1958), 37–57.

who, in the last days, in His love for man assumed a flesh similar to ours; thus (the theologians) attributed the particular meaning of the term 'Wisdom' to His unique composite hypostasis."⁸

Paradoxically, the concept of Divine Wisdom was seen as a synthesis of many elements that reflect the Byzantine religious identity: the legacy of the philosophical wisdom of Antiquity and of the wisdom literature of the Jews (both understood as being fulfilled in Christ), including even the feminine image of Athena, goddess of Wisdom and protectress of both Athens and Constantinople (and, by association, of any Christian city, like Kiev); the well-defined theological categories, inherited from the Cappadocian fathers and centered on the *Person* of Christ, "in whom all divinity dwelt corporeally" (Col. 2:9); the image of the Virgin Mary, temple of Wisdom—not herself "wisdom," but the dwelling of the God who took flesh from her—and the aesthetic ideal of architects, builders of temples, worthy of God.⁹

II

In iconography before the twelfth century, there are a few rather peripheral examples of symbolic female personifications of "Wisdom," particularly in manuscript illuminations.¹⁰ However, in the so-called "Palaeologan Renaissance," the new popularity of symbolic subjects, particularly illustrating Old Testament themes, led to the frequent appearance of wall paintings representing Wisdom, as it is described in biblical Wisdom literature and especially the text found in Prov. 9:1–5:

Wisdom has built her house,
She has set up her seven pillars,
She has slaughtered her beasts, she has mixed her wine,
She has also set her table,
She has sent out her maids (the Septuagint has "servants" in the masculine) to call from the highest places in the town,
"Whoever is simple, let him in here!"

⁸ Philotheos, patriarch of Constantinople, *On the text of Proverbs: Wisdom has built her house and set up seven columns*, ed. V. S. Pseutogkas, Φιλοθέου Κοκκίνου λόγοι καὶ ὁμιλίαι (Thessaloniki, 1981), p. 132, lines 150 ff. Philotheos further interprets the image of the temple in Prov. 9 and applies it either to the flesh of Christ in which Divinity dwelt (p. 134) or to the Virgin Mary, "temple of Wisdom" (p. 138).

⁹ Cf. L. Bouyer, *Le Trône de la Sagesse: Essai sur la signification du culte marial* (Paris, 1957).

¹⁰ Cf. J. Meyendorff, "L'iconographie de la Sagesse divine dans la tradition byzantine," *CahArch* 10 (1959), 259–77 (repr. in J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Hesyasm: Historical, Theological and Social Problems* [London, 1974]).

To him who is without sense she says,
"Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed."

The reason this particular text was preferentially singled out by the artists is obvious. It is used at a very central moment of the Byzantine liturgical year, in the hymnography of Holy Thursday, when the Last Supper is commemorated. The Byzantine liturgy sees in Prov. 9 an Old Testament announcement of the mystery of the Eucharist. The text of the poetic canon, sung at Matins on Holy Thursday, is traditionally attributed to Cosmas of Maiuma, the adopted brother of St. John of Damascus (eighth century).¹¹

The inscrutable Wisdom of God,
Cause of all things and bestower of life,
Built her house out of a pure and ever-Virgin Mother;
For Christ our God, having assumed a fleshly temple,
Was gloriously glorified.

The true Wisdom of God, initiating her friends,
Prepares for them a table, nourisher of souls,
And mixes a cup of immortality for the faithful.
Let us approach piously and cry:
"Christ our God was gloriously glorified."¹²

This eucharistic and christological interpretation of Prov. 9:1–5 is by no means limited to the canon of Cosmas. One finds it also, for instance, in the Byzantine liturgical hymnography of the Nativity cycle,¹³ and this liturgical usage is itself based on standard patristic interpretations since Origen.¹⁴ It is also reflected in the treatises of Patriarch Philotheos, quoted above, on precisely that text of Proverbs.¹⁵ These treatises clearly reflect the particular interest in the Wisdom theme in fourteenth-century Byzantium.

¹¹ There is little reliable information on the biography of these Palestinian poets and monks of the monastery of St. Sabas. However, their decisive role in shaping Byzantine liturgical hymnography is well known. Cf. H. G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959), 515–16; on Cosmas, see also the hagiographical evidence gathered by S. Eustratiades, Κοσμάς ὁ Ἱεροσολυμίτης ὁ ποιητής, *Νέα Σιών* 28 (1933) (several consecutive articles).

¹² Text in liturgical *Triodion* (Athens, 1958), 427 (my trans.). For a full translation of Holy Thursday liturgical texts, see *The Lenten Triodion*, trans. Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware (London, 1978), 548–64.

¹³ Compline (*Apodeipnon*), *Menaion*, 22 December, Canon, Ode 1.

¹⁴ PG 13, 185B; cf., in particular detail, in Anastasius of Sinai (d. ca. A.D. 700), PG 89, col. 593.

¹⁵ "The given passage uncovers, as it seems to me, that mystical table and supper, at which Christ welcomed his disciples in the evening that preceded the night of His passion" (ed. cit. above, note 8, 140–41).

I have neither the possibility nor the competence to describe here in detail the iconography of Wisdom in the Palaeologan period. The illustration of Prov. 9 is found in several important programs of fresco decorations, including St. Clement of Ochrid (1295) (Fig. 2); Gračanica (1321), Dečani (1348), Markov Monastir, near Skoplje (1370); the tower chapel of the monastery of Rila in Bulgaria (Fig. 3a); a monastic church in Zarzma, Georgia, and the church of Volotovo, near Novgorod, in Russia (1363 or 1380).¹⁶

All these examples are illustrations of Prov. 9. They show a basic identity of interpretation and iconographic conception: the figure of Wisdom is that of the Logos-Christ offering the Eucharist as foreshadowed in Proverbs. In Markov Monastir this interpretation is confirmed by an inscription: ἡ ἐνυπόστατος Θεοῦ λόγου σοφία ("the hypostatic Wisdom of God the Word").¹⁷ In most cases the figure of Wisdom has the shape of an angel—which, in principle, would admit also (if one followed the terminological explanation of Wisdom by Patriarch Philotheos) an interpretation of the figure as a divine manifestation or "energy." But still the clearly christological, eucharistic context suggests that the "energy" is at any rate revealed through the incarnation of the Son of God. Such an image, illustrating Ps. 45 (46):4–5 (in the Septuagint: "The Most High has sanctified His tabernacle. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved"), appears also in the so-called Kievan Psalter of 1397: the Angel-Wisdom appears in a temple, supporting its structure with raised hands.¹⁸ This christological interpretation is confirmed by the

fact that in the recently uncovered frescoes in Khrel's tower at Rila the Wisdom figure is not that of an angel but of a young man, reminiscent of Emmanuel, the figure of a beardless Christ, known in Early Christian art (Fig. 3b).¹⁹

All the examples quoted above include an image of the Temple with seven columns (in Rila and Markov monasteries the seven columns are replaced by personifications of the seven gifts of the Spirit; cf. Isa. 9:2–3) and the figures of the "servants," distributing bread and wine. These servants are male or angel-like (the Greek Septuagint text has δούλοι) in Ochrid, Dečani, Zarzma, and Volotovo, but in Gračanica they are female figures, reflecting the Latin text of Proverbs (*famulae*, "maids").

This iconographic tradition, so well represented in the fourteenth century, appears also—practically intact, but often in a more elaborate rendition—in several Russian portable icons of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For instance, on an icon of the sixteenth-century Novgorodian school (Fig. 4), one sees a female figure of Wisdom, whose identification with Christ is nevertheless indicated by an inscription: "Power and Wisdom of God" (title of Christ in 1 Cor. 1:24); a medallion of the Virgin and Child ("Wisdom has built her house"); the temple with seven columns; the seven gifts of the Spirit in the form of angels; the seven ecumenical councils; the slaughtering of a beast; the eucharistic distribution; and, to underline the christological and liturgical context of the composition, a figure of St. Cosmas, author of the canon of Holy Thursday, holding a scroll.²⁰

In the Novgorod region this complicated iconography of Wisdom is frequently replaced by a much simpler and harmonious composition

¹⁶ With the exception of Rila, these monuments are analyzed in Meyendorff, "Iconographie." On Rila see L. Prashkov, *Khrelovata Kula* (Sofia, 1973), 23–43, and "Khrelova bashnya Ril'skogo monastirya: ee zhivopis," in *Drevne russkoe iskusstvo. Zarubezhnye svyazi* (Moscow, 1975), 152–57; on Zarzma see also L. M. Evseeva, "Dve simvolicheskie kompozitsii i rospisi XIV veka monastirya Zarzma," *VizVrem* 43 (1982), 134–40; the Volotovo frescoes, destroyed during World War II, have now become accessible through the publication of excellent photographs taken in 1909–10 by L. N. Matsulevich (1886–1959), a pupil of D. V. Ainalov, and published recently by M. V. Alpatov, *Frescoes of the Church of the Assumption at Volotovo Polye* (Moscow, 1977). The text is in both Russian and English. The "Wisdom" fresco is reproduced on pl. 12. On Volotovo see also T. A. Sidorova, "Volotovskaya freska 'Premudrost sozda sebe dom', i ee otnoshenie k Novgorodskoy eresi strigol'nikov," *Akademiya Nauk. Otdel drevne-russkoy literatury, Trudy* 24 (Leningrad, 1971), 212–31. I am deeply grateful to my Bulgarian colleagues Elka Bakalova and Lyuben Prashkov for the reproductions of the Rila frescoes (Figs. 3a, b).

¹⁷ Cf. S. Radojčić, "Freske Markova monastirya," *ZR* 49 (1957), 215–25.

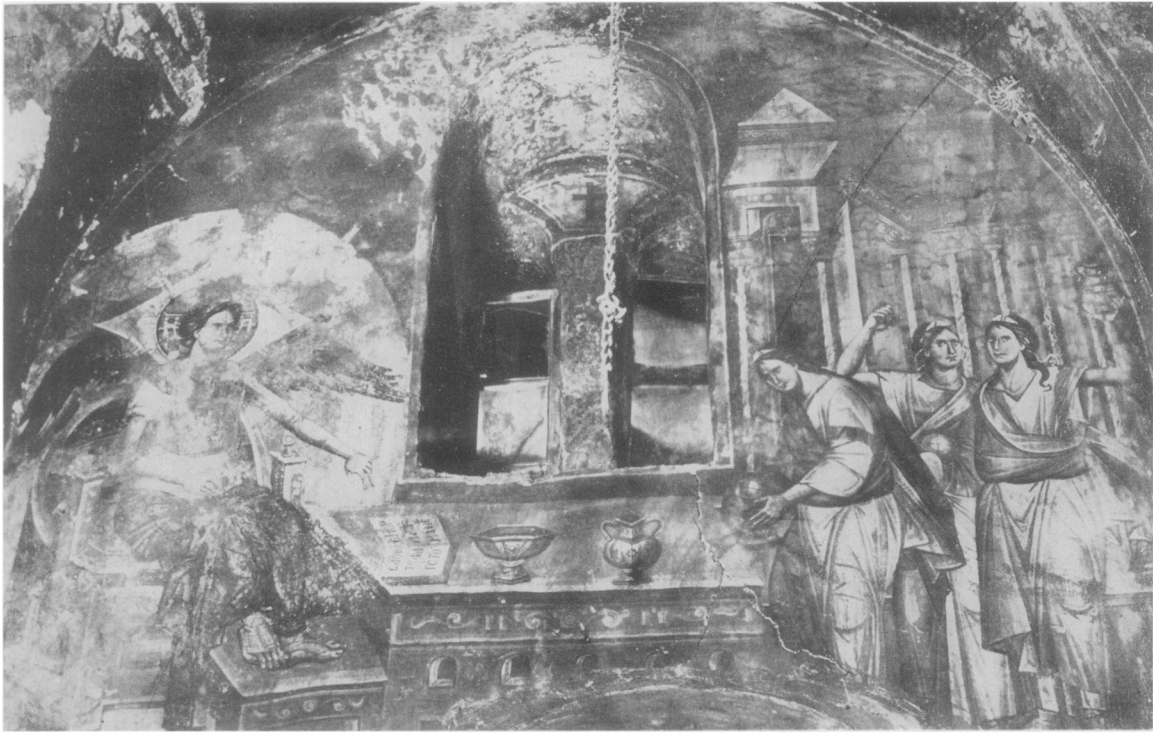
¹⁸ *Kievskaya Psaltir 1397g*, facsimile ed. (Moscow, 1978), fol. 63.

¹⁹ Prashkov, *Khrelovata Kula*, 23. At Zarzma, Wisdom also appears as the figure of a man but with three faces, which would presuppose a trinitarian interpretation. This rather curious conception—although it finds a parallel (of Western origin) at the Perivleptos of Ochrid—remains somewhat problematic because of the poor condition of the Zarzma frescoes. Could it be a recent repainting? Evseeva (op. cit., 190–91), however, admits it as going back to the original 14th-century strata of the Zarzma paintings.

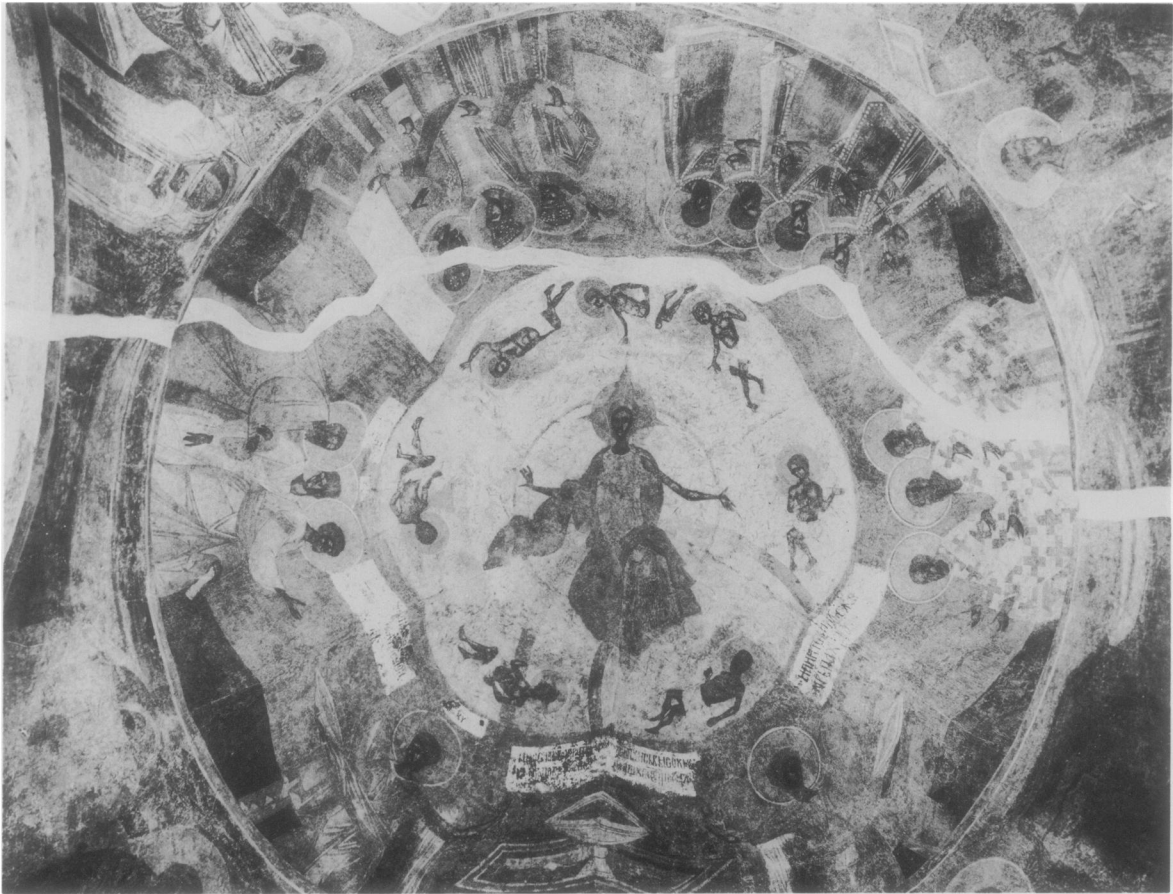
²⁰ The icon, dated ca. 1548, is at the Tretyakov Gallery (V. I. Antonova and N. E. Mneva, *Katalog drevne-russkoi zhivopisi* (Moscow, 1963), II, 25, no. 365. (It is dated to the 15th century by H. Kjellin, *Ryska Ikoner* [Stockholm, 1956], 261–62.) Several similar examples in G. M. Prokhorov, "Poslanie Titu-ierarkhu Dionisiya Areopagita v slavyanskome perevode i ikonografiya 'Premudrost sozda sebe dom,'" in *Akademiya Nauk. Otdel drevne-russkoi literatury, Trudy* 38 (Leningrad, 1985), 9–13. The author points out the possibility of the direct influence of the writings of Ps.-Dionysius, translated into Slavic in the 14th century, upon this iconography.



1. Kiev, St. Sophia, mosaics of the apse, ca. 1037 (after A. Grabar, *L'art du moyen âge en Europe orientale* [Paris, 1968], p. 143)



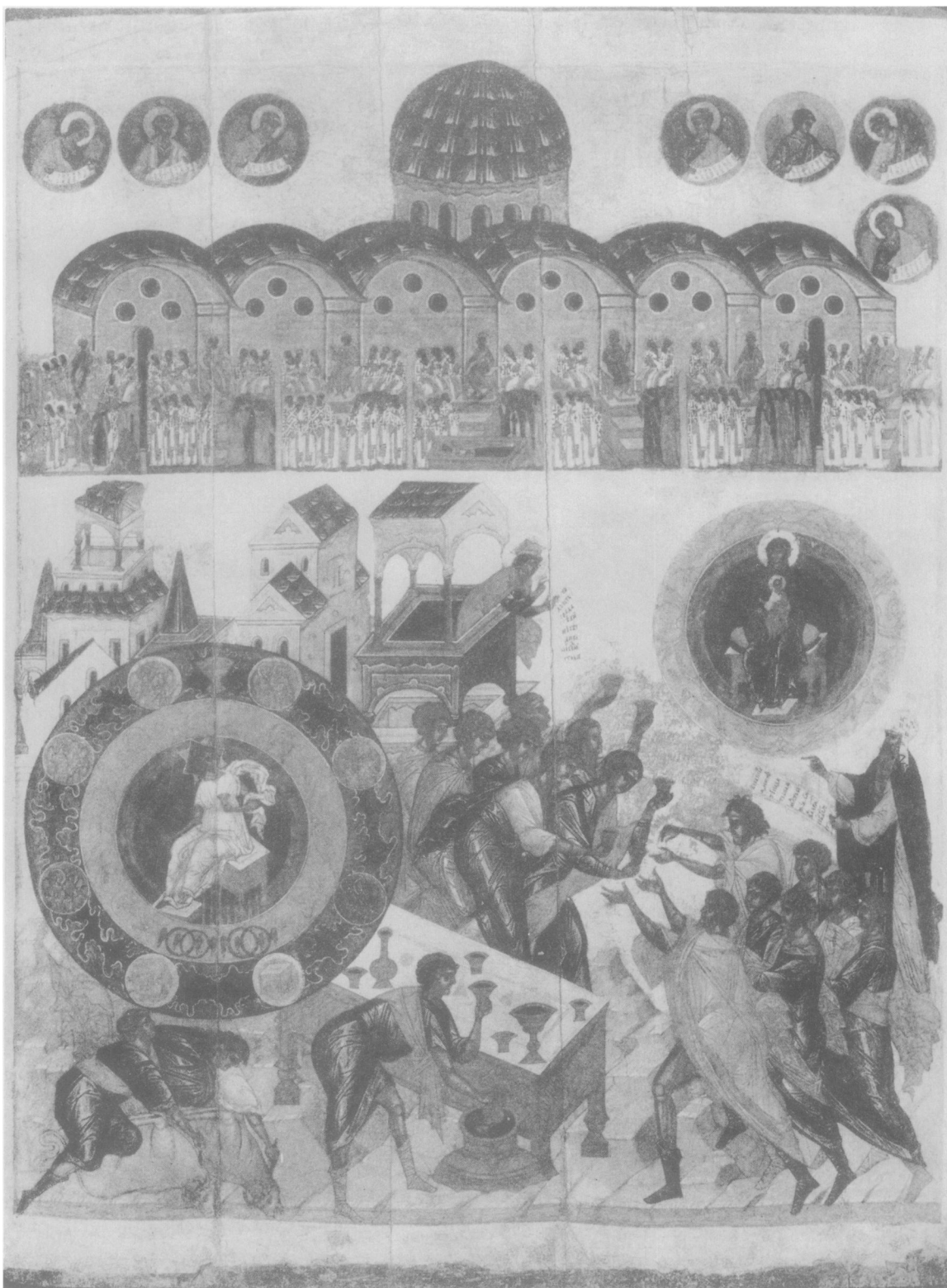
2. Ochrid, St. Clement, the supper of Wisdom, late thirteenth century (after V. R. Petkovitch, *La peinture serbe au moyen âge*, I [Belgrade, 1930], pl. 24a)



3a. Monastery of Rila, Bulgaria, tower chapel, the temple of Wisdom, ca. 1335 (after L. Prashkov, in *Drevne russkoe iskusstvo. Zarubezhnye svyazi* [Moscow, 1975], pp. 150–51)



3b. Detail of Figure 3a: Wisdom-Emmanuel, ca. 1335



4. Novgorod, Russia, icon, the temple of Wisdom, ca. 1548 (after V. I. Antonova and N. E. Mneva, *Katalog drevne-russkoi zhivopisi*, III [Moscow, 1963], no. 365, pl. 3)



5. Novgorod, Russia, icon, Wisdom-Angel, sixteenth century (after Antonova-Mneva, *Katalog*, no. 482, pl. 28)

(Fig. 5): the Wisdom-Angel, sitting on a throne, crowned and holding a scepter, with the Virgin and St. John the Baptist standing nearby (the Deesis scheme) and a figure of Christ above it. This "Novgorod Sophia," soon adopted in Muscovy, preserves the incarnational, christological significance of its earlier models but corresponds better to the function of a portable icon, figuring clearly the Person, object of the faithful's veneration, rather than illustrating a particular scriptural text.

In sixteenth-century Muscovy, however, some confusion as to the personal identity of Wisdom is reflected in a treatise by the monk Zinovy of Otna. Criticizing the action of Archbishop Gennady of Novgorod (1484–1504), who established a "patronal feast" for the cathedral of St. Sophia in Novgorod on 15 August, the day of the Virgin's Dormition, Zinovy sees the danger of an identification of "Wisdom" with the person of the Virgin. Although this might not have been Gennady's intention (he probably held the generally accepted view of the Virgin as "temple of Wisdom," according to Prov. 9, which perfectly justifies the establishment of the major Marian feast as a "patronal" celebration at the cathedral of St. Sophia), Zinovy considered it necessary to reassert vigorously the identification of Wisdom with the hypostatic Logos, Second Person of the Trinity, assuming flesh from Mary.²¹

III

Nevertheless, the confusion feared by Zinovy became quite widespread in Muscovy in the seventeenth century, as Russia, in a cultural watershed, was experiencing a gradual, but radical, breakdown of the cultural traditions inherited from Byzantium and was undergoing massive Western influences.

In iconography, side by side with the traditional figures of Wisdom as Logos, there appear icons presenting *Sophia* with a more ambiguous identity: the figure of the Father replaces that of Christ and the composition includes Joachim and Anna, the parents of the Virgin. Other features also point to the idea of a specific election of Mary, personified

by Wisdom.²² This trend is reflected in a curious piece of Russian liturgical composition of the seventeenth century: a full hymnographic set, or *sluzhba* (Gr. ἀκολουθία), in honor of "Sophia, Wisdom of God," to be celebrated (originally in Novgorod) on 15 August, jointly with the service of the Dormition, and composed by an interesting and adventurous individual, Prince Symeon Shakhovskoy. Having served in various military capacities with various private armies, which competed with each other during the "Time of Troubles" (1606–12), several times exiled, married four times, excommunicated by Patriarch Filaret, then fulfilling diplomatic missions—including an attempt to convert the shah of Persia to Orthodox Christianity—Symeon never ceased to write treatises on religious subjects, lives of saints and liturgical hymnography, including the above-mentioned office in honor of "Sophia." Claiming still to represent the Byzantine legacy, the princely hymnographer deliberately duplicates the identity of *Sophia*, as both Christ and the Virgin:

O God Father Almighty . . . ,
I dare to sing the protectress of the World,
The Virgin and immaculate Bride,
Whose virginal soul Thou hast called Thy temple,
Because of the incarnation of Thy Word.
Thou hast called Her also Sophia, Wisdom of God,
And in Her name, Thou hast ordered Emperor
Justinian to build a church . . .²³

Shakhovskoy's office was understandably criticized, then reedited by two learned Greek theologians, the brothers Likhoudes, who also composed a treatise affirming the tradition of identifying *Sophia* with Christ.²⁴ However, in either the original or in the edited form, the office was never ad-

²² Cf. the icon *Otrygnu serdtse moe*, of the early 17th century, in Antonova and Mneva, *Katalog*, II, no. 1010. Similar trends existed in the Ukraine, where Latin influences were the strongest and where the new iconography could well have reflected the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (cf. G. Florovsky, "Christ, the Wisdom of God in Byzantine Theology," *Sixième Congrès International des Etudes Byzantines, Alger, 1939, Rapports et communications* (Paris, 1940), 255–60; also "O pochitanii Sofii Premudrosti Bozhiey v Vizantii i na Rusi," *Trudy V S'ezda russkikh akademicheskikh organizatsii za granitsei*, I (Sofia, 1932), 480 ff.

²³ On Shakhovskoy and his hymnography, see A. I. Nikol'sky, "Sophiya Premudrost' Bozhiya," *Vestnik arkheologii i istorii* 17 (St. Petersburg, 1906), Prilozhenie, III and esp. F. G. Spassky, *Russkoe liturgicheskoe tvorchestvo* (Paris, 1951), 254–73; cf. also the full French trans. of the service, and an introduction by F. G. Spassky, in "L'Office liturgique slave de la Sagesse de Dieu," in *Irenikon* 30 (1957), 164–88.

²⁴ Cf. M. Smentsovsky, *Brat'ya Likhudy* (St. Petersburg, 1899), 349.

²¹ Text of Zinovy, "Skazanie isvestno chto est' Sofey Premudrost' Bozhiya," ed. G. Filimonov. *Ocherki russkoi khristianskoy ikonografii. I. Sofiya Premudrost' Bozhiya*, in *Vestnik obshchevtva drevnerusskago iskusstva pri Moskovskom publichnom muzee*, 1874–76 (Moscow, 1887), *Materialy*, 1–5.

mitted in the ecclesiastically approved and officially printed *Menaia* of the Russian Church.

The history of the iconographic development and the debates concerning it would have ended at this point, if they had not been revived in the modern period. This revival might appear to have no direct relevance to Byzantine and medieval art history. However, a brief mention of it at the conclusion of this paper can be useful in one respect: to explain the continuous and frequently passionate interest in the topic among Russian scholars.

Within the complicated and tortured intellectual world of Russia in the decades preceding the Revolution of 1917, the influence of Vladimir S. Soloviev (1853–1900) is one of the most decisive. It is he who introduced among his contemporaries the use of the concept of Wisdom-*Sophia* as symbol and model of his thought, especially as it took shape in the later years of his life. In the tradition of Plotinus, Origen, Nicholas of Cusa, and particularly the German idealists Schelling and Hegel, Soloviev viewed the concept of the absolute goodness of reality as transcending the distinction between Creator and creatures, God and the world. Open to theosophic and Gnostic ideas, he identified *Sophia* not only with this basic, all-embracing Absolute, but also—in the framework of his enthusiasm for Latin Christianity and Western Mariology in particular—with Mary, the incarnation of the Eternal Feminine.

The thought of Soloviev—as well as that of his contemporary F. M. Dostoyevsky²⁵—stood at the origin of quite a religious revival among a significant part of the Intelligentsia. This included men like Paul Florensky (1882–1943), an eminent priest, scientist, and philosopher, who died in a concentration camp (but was posthumously rehabilitated in 1956), and S. N. Bulgakov (1871–1944), who abandoned the career of a Marxist political economist to become a theologian. These thinkers, personally committed to Orthodox Christianity, were understandably concerned with establishing some connection between Soloviev's

Gnostic mysticism of the unity of all things within God's Wisdom and the tradition of the Church. This concern expressed itself in attempts to interpret the Wisdom iconography—which they knew primarily through its later Russian expressions—and the liturgical creation of Shakhovskoy, to which they tended to attribute too much importance.²⁶

Of course, the arguments, based on the iconographic and liturgical tradition, were quite peripheral to Florensky's and Bulgakov's basic conception of the Divine Wisdom as the eternal foundation of existence, essence of God Himself, but also eternal humanity, by whose power creatures came into being. They used iconographic examples more like proof-texts than real arguments. It is therefore easy for art historians and historians of Christian thought to approach such questionable references with some irony. And indeed, confusion of methodologies is the worst enemy of authentic knowledge. It remains, however, that the historical role and intellectual prestige of the Russian "sophiologists" are great, and their commitment to religious philosophy—for which some of them paid with their lives—deserves respect on a level different from that of art history. That they were the ones to raise again the issue of Wisdom explains much of the modern interest in the ambivalent and complex theme of the divine *Sophia* in Christian art and in religious thought in general.

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²⁵ Cf. the role of Sonia, a diminutive of Sophia, in *Crime and Punishment*.

²⁶ P. Florensky makes use of the *Sophia* iconographic tradition in his most important work, *Stolp i utverzhenie istiny* (Moscow, 1914); Fr. trans. by C. Andronikof, *La colonne et le fondement de la vérité* (Lausanne, 1975); cf. esp. pp. 239–54. S. N. Bulgakov often insists on making both Christ and the Virgin manifestations of Wisdom: "The Mother of God is a personal manifestation of the *Sophia*, the Wisdom of God, which, in another sense, is Christ the Power and Wisdom of God. Thus there are two personal images of Sophia: one created and one 'theanthropic' and two human images in heaven: the God-Man and the Mother of God," *Kupina neopalimaia* (Paris, 1926), 138–39. Another major work by Bulgakov in which the *Sophia* doctrine is developed is *Agnets Bozhii* (Paris, 1933), trans. C. Andronikof, *Du Verbe Incarné. L'Agneau de Dieu* (Lausanne, 1982). Cf. also J. Pain and N. Zernov, *A Bulgakov Anthology* (Philadelphia, 1976), 144–56.